

VZCZCXR08477

PP RUEHBZ RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHSB #0123/01 0460909

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 150909Z FEB 07

FM AMEMBASSY HARARE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1133

INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1473

RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 1329

RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1477

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0168

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0738

RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1103

RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1531

RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 3927

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1300

RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1956

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC//DHO-7//

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1694

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK//DOOC/ECMO/CC/DAO/DOB/DOI//

RUEPGBA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE//ECJ23-CH/ECJ5M//

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000123

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

USAID FOR M. COPSON AND E. LOKEN

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL ZI

SUBJECT: POLICE ARREST SCORES OF WOMEN AND STUDENTS TO THWART PROTESTS

¶11. (U) Summary. Police in Harare and Bulawayo on February 13 arrested more than 250 participants in peaceful demonstrations staged by Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) to protest the country's worsening political and economic crisis. An estimated 2,000 WOZA supporters participated in the group's annual Valentine's Day Campaign in the two cities; WOZA reported that it was their largest demonstrations to date. Police used tear gas to disperse marchers in Harare and reportedly assaulted several marchers while breaking up the demonstration in Bulawayo. On the same day, Harare police also arrested 50 students participating in a Zimbabwe National Student's Union (ZINASU) meeting to discuss skyrocketing tuition fees. The strong response by police comes in the wake of ongoing and looming labor actions across key sectors. End Summary.

WOZA Delivers Valentine's Message A Day Early

¶12. (U) In Harare, the WOZA march with about 1,000 participants started in front of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) offices where earlier that morning WOZA leaders had delivered a copy of its "People's Charter" to UN representatives asking for support in pressuring the government for social justice. The march continued to Parliament where police in riot gear met the group with tear gas.

¶13. (SBU) WOZA National Coordinator Jenni Williams told poloff that despite 15 minutes of singing slogans and dancing, the group dispersed on its own. A small number of WOZA

supporters continued on toward ZANU-PF headquarters, but decided to stop when approached by police with dogs. During the course of the march, police arrested eight women. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) lawyer Otto Saki told us they were released the following day after paying admission of guilt fines.

¶4. (U) The WOZA demonstration in Bulawayo also involved roughly 1,000 marchers. However, it met with a much harsher response. Williams told us police arrested 274 marchers and heavily assaulted several individuals while breaking up the demonstration. The authorities appeared more prepared in Bulawayo. A large number of police were present from the start of the march and toward its conclusion riot police swooped in and brutally beat up a number of the marchers. Saki told us that ZLHR lawyers had managed to contact 83 persons in police custody and that charges were still pending against those detained.

Students Protest Hike In Tuition Fees

¶5. (U) On the same day as the WOZA marches, Harare police also arrested 50 students at Harare Polytechnical College for participating in a meeting to discuss tuition fees that were increased in some instances by 2,000 percent to Z\$560,000 (about US\$110 using the parallel exchange rate) at State universities for the 2007 first semester.

¶6. (SBU) According to press reports, ZINASU representatives claimed that approximately 80,000 of the 250,000 university and college students throughout the country have dropped-out

HARARE 00000123 002 OF 002

over the past year as a result of the unaffordable fees. Saki told poloff that police had released all but 12 of the ZINASU leaders, who had been charged under the Crimes against Public Order Act for unlawful assembly and disorderly conduct. He added that police intelligence officials were interviewing the student leaders.

Comment

¶7. (U) The strong response by police occurs in a charged atmosphere of ongoing and looming labor actions in key sectors. Junior doctors have been out on strike over poor wages since December and medical care at State hospitals has suffered immensely. Additionally, some teachers at secondary schools are participating in a "go-slow" action, university lecturers are threatening to strike and university students are planning protests. There also are widespread rumors that other civil servants may call for a stay-away and that junior police and military officers are grumbling about walking off the job rather than accept paupers' wages.

¶8. (U) In a move to take advantage of this building momentum, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has announced February 23 as the deadline for the government to improve working and living conditions or risk more industrial actions. ZCTU has been relatively inactive of late, however, and it remains unclear if labor and civil society can pull off effective and coordinated labor actions and keep the momentum going. But the harsh police response in Harare and Bulawayo demonstrates how concerned the government is by the demonstrations*and by the increasing number of participants.

SCHULTZ